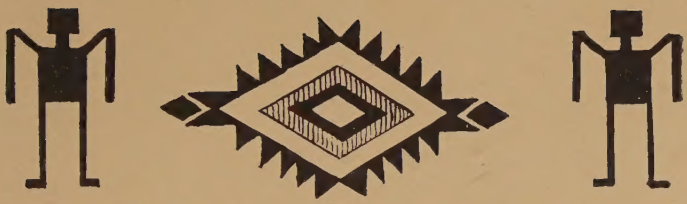
INDIAN DESIGNS AND SYMBOLS

WHITNEY



INDIAN DESIGNS AND SYMBOLS

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by

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29 Pine Street
Danvers, Massachusetts

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INDIAN DESIGNS and SYMBOLS

As I presume is the case with most teachers, especially teachers of art, a little note book and a sketch book have long been my almost constant companions.

Often these have been helpful reminders of events, incidents, experiences, and details which I have found invaluable later on in my teaching, and which, but for such reminders and illustrations, might have been forgotten.

The use of these sketch books has been especially valuable to me while on trips through Arizona, New Mexico, and California, as well as in the East, during visits in Indian villages and pueblos.

I have jotted down myths, legends, stories, and interesting experiences; made sketches of baskets. blankets, pottery, and innumerable decorative details, which have been most fascinating and suggestive. Other designs have been given to me by acquaintances who knew of my interest, and so the collection has grown.

It was my good fortune to have a friend who for years had visited among the Indians and who had a large collection of the craftsmen's productions, which she was able to show and interpret to me, and allow me to use.

All these I find quite as useful today — as during the time I was collecting them—as illustrative material

in the classroom. Pupils of all ages are delighted with the designs and the meanings which they convey.

These sketches are in frequent use in the classes in design, for they illustrate many of the laws of order, such as repetition, alternation, progression, etc., and their use in borders, areas, and fields; and they make an immediate appeal to the pupil, much more readily than do naturalistic units for design, or simple geometric patterns. They have also been used with classes in geography, history, language, and other studies as illustrative material and design units, and have proved most helpful. Children in the lowest grades have frequently woven them into story form, and delight in interpreting them.

Having given some of these to my pupils and teachers, and being constantly asked for more, I am glad to present this collection of drawing to all who may find it useful.

The designs have been classified as well as may be into units suggesting

1. Natural phenomena.
2. Natural features.
3. Man and animal life.
4. Birds and butterflies.
5. Occupations.
6. Myth, legend, history, and geometric patterns.

The study of symbolism is most fascinating, but owing to the Indians' natural distrust of the white man, it has been difficult often-times to obtain the meaning of their designs. Many of the details are

almost sacred, being frequently the story of some important event or experience in the life of the individual or her tribe.

The origin and derivation of many of these we may not know, but I give the interpretation of some as I have found them used, or as they have been given to me. In many cases the explanation is hardly necessary, for the drawings, though departing from nature, are nevertheless most suggestive. Many a child who has been given the meaning of a few details has readily discovered the interpretation of others, and takes great joy in applying them in his school work.

The inspiration of most of the designs was found in nature, but the limitations imposed by the materials used in weaving often necessitated straight lines and angles where curves were pictured in the mind of the weaver. So here again, although the symbol is perfectly evident to the maker, to the novice it becomes merely an interesting combination of queer figures and lines.

We are told that the decoration or symbol used in the painting or weaving depended largely upon the use to which the object was to be put. On ceremonial baskets or vessels, one finds people, animals, incidents and objects suggestive of that ceremony. The same is true of occupations or events. On objects for burden bearing, feathers or birds were used to lighten the burden, water units and borders are found on water carriers, all these adding to the efficiency of the object.

These sketches were taken from the weaving and

painting of various tribes, and there will be no attempt to classify them. Different tribes, though often using similar designs, adapted these patterns to their own ideas, experiences, stories, and folk lore. They are given here chiefly for their beauty, and as interesting details in the study of design, also to create and foster among our pupils an appreciation of a thoroughly artistic people, who have given to us examples of a purely American art.

The products are not only useful objects, but beautiful as well. This element of beauty in form and the applied decoration is manifested in the commonest things. Geometric designs and patterns, woven and painted as decorative arrangements and without symbolic significance, are frequently found. Many of these have been handed down from generation to generation, and have become traditional types.

We are sure that much thought and meaning were manifested, whatever the tribe or individual producing the object. The same type of symbolism is exemplified in these objects as one sees upon totem poles here and there, but in addition to this, there is a charm of combination in design and arrangement, and a subtle beauty of form and proportion in the pottery or basket as the case may be. Many vessels are not only decorated with symbolic details, but the object itself is given the form of the human figure, bird or animal, frequently bordering on the grotesque.

The originals of some of these illustrations were painted, others woven with fine or coarse fibers, and

still others of wools. In these cases the outline naturally varies from the smooth line to the coarse or fine outline or blocked pattern. Here the simple outline is given.

The maker and designer of these objects was at once botanist, historian, colorist, poet, designer, and craftsman: facts which have been little appreciated by the white man, but which now challenge his consideration.

The more one reads and studies these peoples and the results of their industry, the more his admiration and appreciation grow. He finds here a real art, worthy of consideration, study, and use.

CHARLES FREDERICK WHITNEY
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PLATE ONE

This plate presents conspicuous illustrations of the use of dots, lines, and combinations of these in borders, areas and surfaces.

They illustrate wonderfully well the laws of order, repetition, alternation, and progression which we are teaching in our schools and design classes today.

Later plates show how these same laws were appropriated in the use of modified geometric figures and nature units. It is interesting to observe how much pure design was produced by the Indians.

Most of these arrangements were taken from surface designs.

PLATE ONE

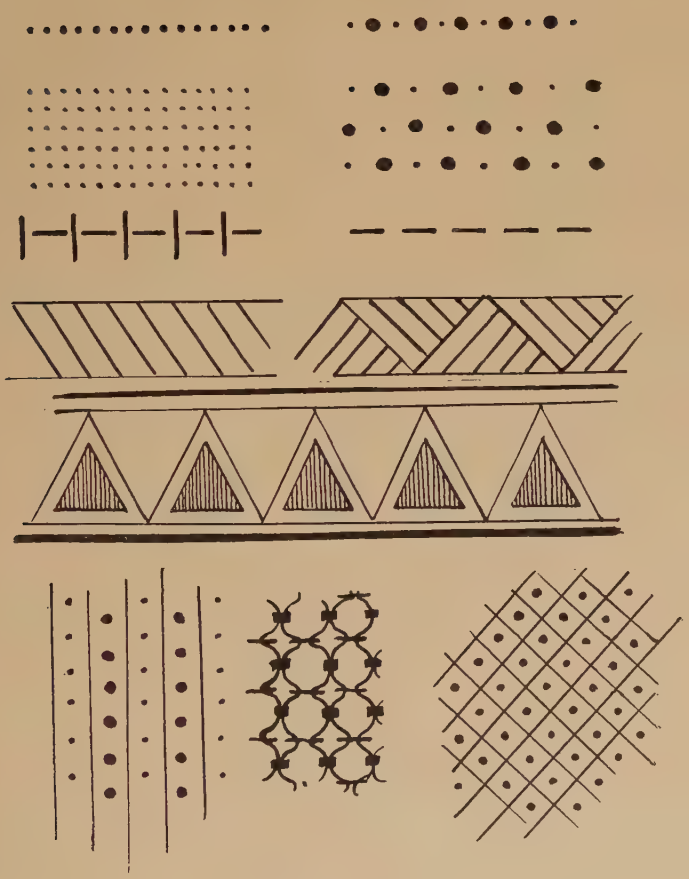


PLATE TWO

1. Drops upon the surface of water.
2. Rain. Good crops.
3. Rain.
4. Lightning.
5. Clouds.
6. Clouds.
7. Clouds.
8. Clouds with rain.
9. Sun unit. Happiness. Prosperity.
10. Sun unit.
11. Sun unit.
12. Sun unit.
13. Sun unit.
14. All day.
15. All night.
16. A constellation.
17. Moon.
18. Star units. These are found in a great variety of radial designs.

PLATE TWO

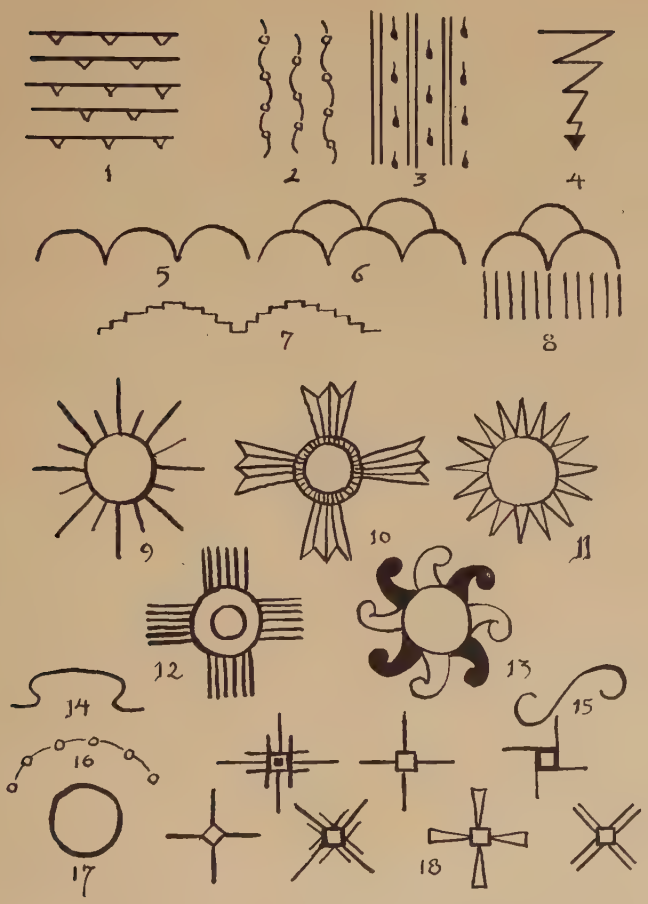


PLATE THREE

19. A, B, C. Storms, tempests, cyclones, etc.
20. D. E. Four winds of heaven. (See Plate 18.)
21. A, B. Rainbow.
22. Light and darkness.
    Day and night.
23. Various meanings.
    Evolution of life. (See Plate 18.)
    Points of compass. Sometimes the four points were used. Again the North, East, South, West, and Here. Still again seven points—North, East, South, West, Up, Down, and Here.
    Here was the all important point.
24. Flames of fire.
    These sometimes indicate a camping place; again, a period of severe cold.
25. Periods of time.
    Morning, noon, afternoon.
    See (2) on Plate 18.

PLATE THREE

PLATE FOUR

1. Surface of land.
   Plateaus and valleys, with crescent moon and stars.
2. Plateaus and valleys.
3. Mountains and valleys. Mountains signify abundance.
4. Mountains and valleys.
5. Mountains and valleys, with forests on the mountains, and fertile valleys with springs.
   Streams down the mountain-side.
   In 3 and 5, the dark lines signify earth, the white space between them, water.
6. Mountain ranges with lakes in the valleys.
7. An animal's den or a cave.
8. A, B, C, D, E, F. Surface of water, or streams, ripples, waves, etc.
   Such designs occur in almost endless variety.
9. An eddy in the brook.

Mesa,

PLATE FOUR

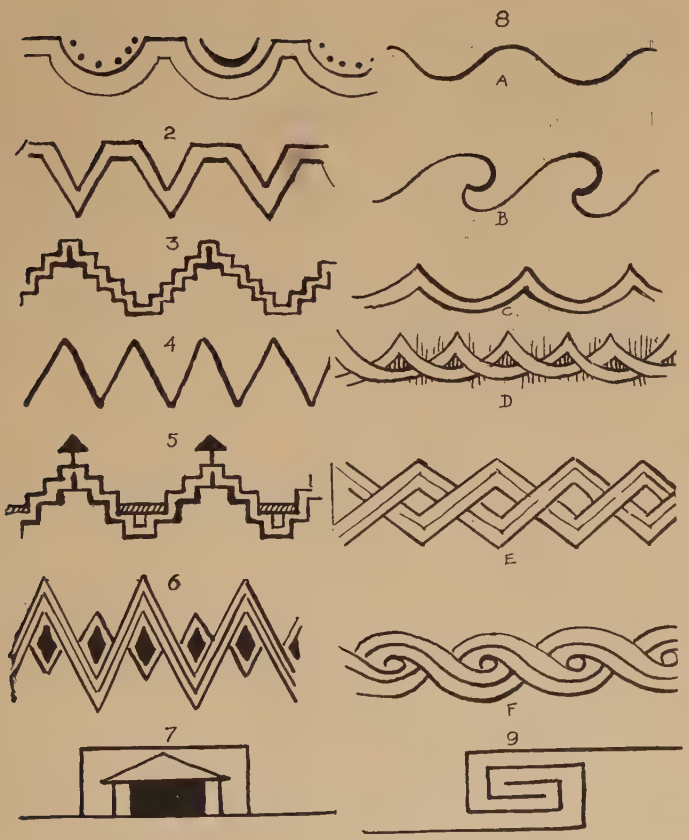


PLATE FIVE

10. A, B. Surface of water with flowers or lily-pads floating.
11. Rain upon the mountain side, with brooks flowing down the slope.
12. A cascade.
13. Ponds with islands.
14. Reeds with blossoms.
15. A, B. Flower units, used in borders and surface patterns.
16. Pine needles.
17. Reeds or rushes.
18. Trees. A forest.

Tailpiece—Trees in progression.

PLATE FIVE

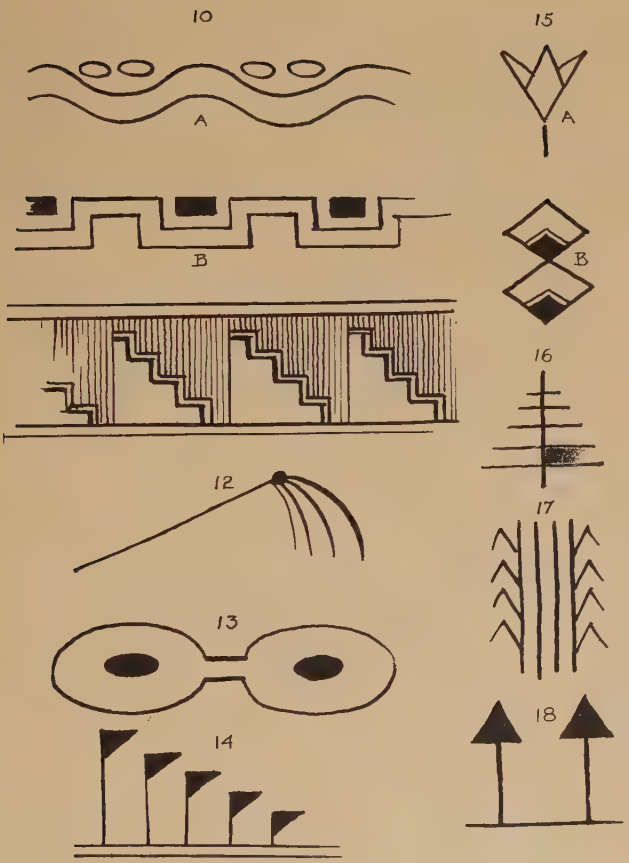


PLATE SIX

19. Sunset behind trees.
    Taken from a basket woven by a very old squaw.
20. A tree struck by lightning.
21. A, B, C. Plant forms with leaves or blossoms.
22. Reeds in alternating design.
23. Probably an open flower.
24. Plant form. Toadstools in alternating design.

PLATE SIX

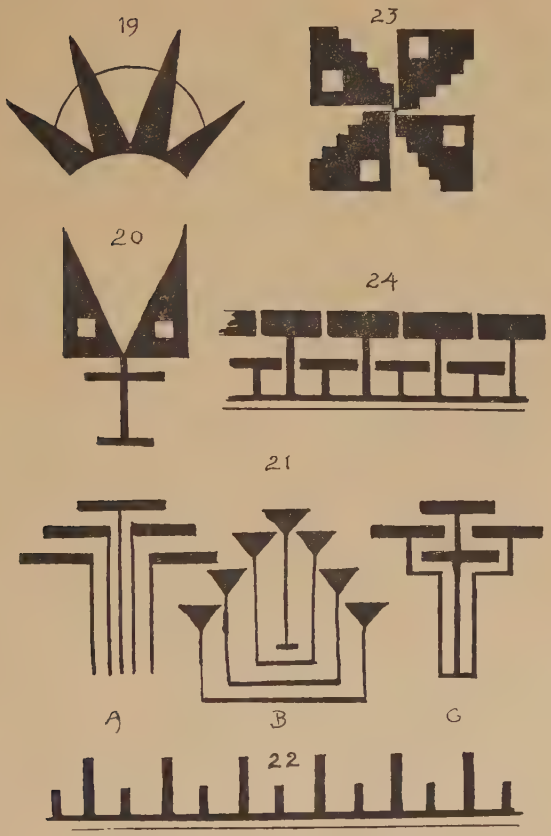


PLATE SEVEN

1. A, B. Deer.
2. Deer shot by Indian.
3. Unknown animal.
4. Horse (tail down).
5. Dog or wolf (tail up).
6. A, B, C, D. Animal tracks.
7. A, B, C, D. Snake or snake tracks. The snake suggests defiance; sometimes wisdom.
8. Rattles of rattlesnake.
9. Fish. Sturgeon.
10. Shark's teeth.

Tailpiece. Antelope.

PLATE SEVEN

PLATE EIGHT

11. Lizard.
12. A, B, C. Turtle.
13. Turtle backs above surface of water.
14. Spider web and spider units.
15. Dragon fly.
16. Moth.
17. Frog's head.
18. Ant hill.
19. Fly units in surface pattern.
20. Fly units in border.
21. Unknown.

Tailpiece. Border with frog's head units.

PLATE EIGHT

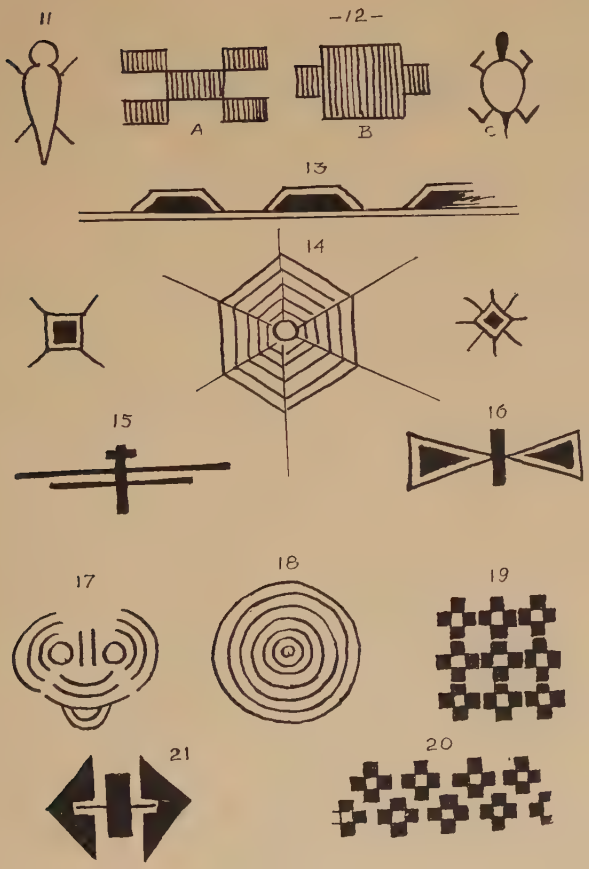


PLATE NINE

22. Brave in action.
    Similar figures are drawn representing a great variety of activities.
23. Squaw.
24. Squaw.

Tailpiece. Types of human head arranged in design.

PLATE NINE

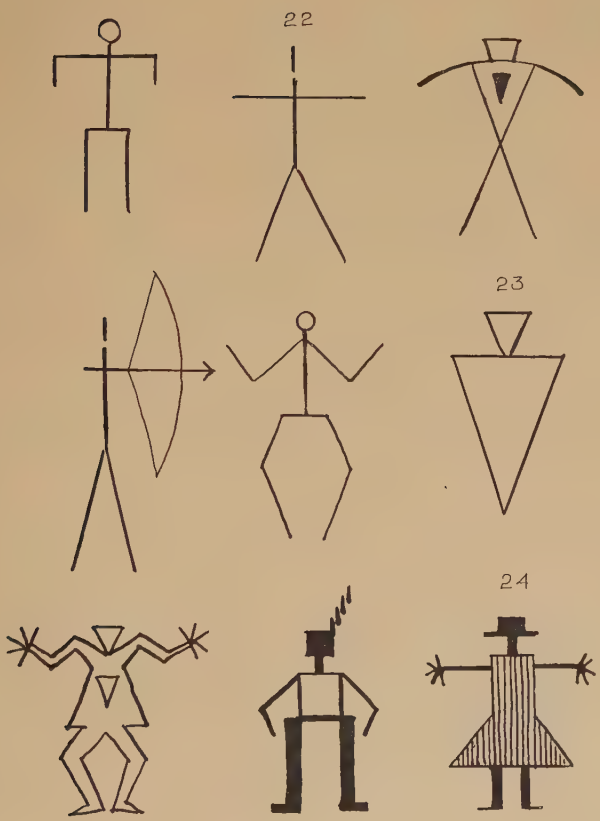


PLATE TEN

1, 2. The human eye.
3. The human face.
4. Head with hair and teeth.
5. Head with hair.
6. The human face.
7. Heart and lungs.
8. Intestines.
9. Human face.
10. Ornament used with face. No. 9, on ancient piece of wood carving.

These units were used singly as ornaments, or combined in repetition, alternation, etc. in borders and surface patterns.

9

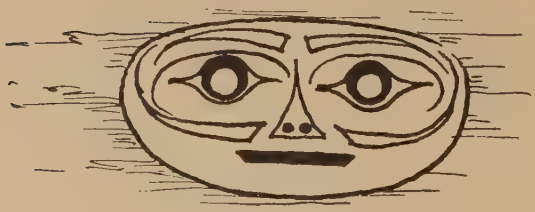


PLATE TEN

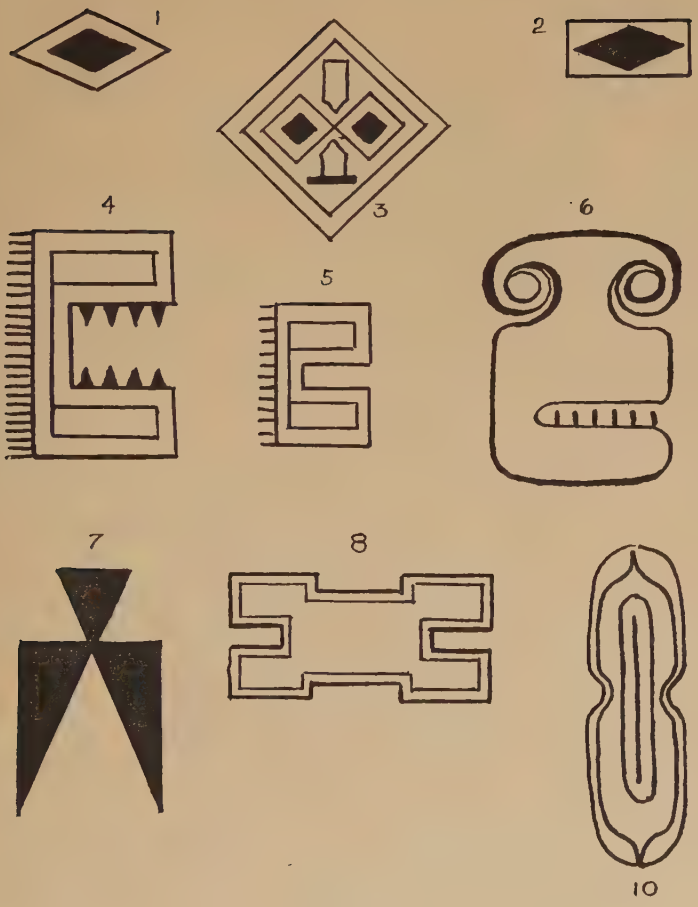
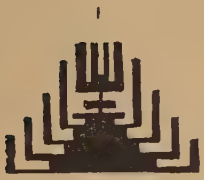


PLATE ELEVEN

1. Reeds and flowers.
2. Nature unit, arranged in balance and progression.
3. Human face.
4. Human face, in border design.

PLATE ELEVEN



1

2

3

4

PLATE TWELVE

1. A. Flight of wild birds. Repetition.
   B. Flight of wild birds. Repetition in groups.
2. Birds over surface of water. Arranged in border. Progression and repetition.
3. A, B. Flights of wild birds. Progression.
4. A. Birds leaving the nest.
   B. Birds leaving the nest in tree-top.
5. Bird. Repeated on opposite sides of basket.
6. Flight of birds with leader.

PLATE TWELVE

PLATE THIRTEEN

7. A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Types of feather units. Feathers were an important feature in Indian design, and had symbolic meaning. The Great Spirit first appeared in the form of a beautiful white feather.
8. A. Border from owl units.
   B. Border of owl heads from a piece of pottery.

Tailpiece. Design from woven rug.
Feather units.

PLATE THIRTEEN

PLATE FOURTEEN

Birds and the tracks of birds.

Birds and feathers in a great variety are conspicuous in Indian design and decoration. Frequently the actual feathers are woven into a basket.

A bird design on a carrying basket was supposed to lighten the burden.

PLATE FOURTEEN

PLATE FIFTEEN

9. A, B. Butterflies' wings.
10. A. Butterfly in motion.
    Ascending prayer for rain from any quarter. The cross lines indicate rain.
    B. Butterfly.
11. Flight of butterflies or birds. Tracks of animals.
12. Butterflies in flight.
13. A, B. Butterflies' wings.
    Interesting arrangements illustrating progression in design.

PLATE FIFTEEN

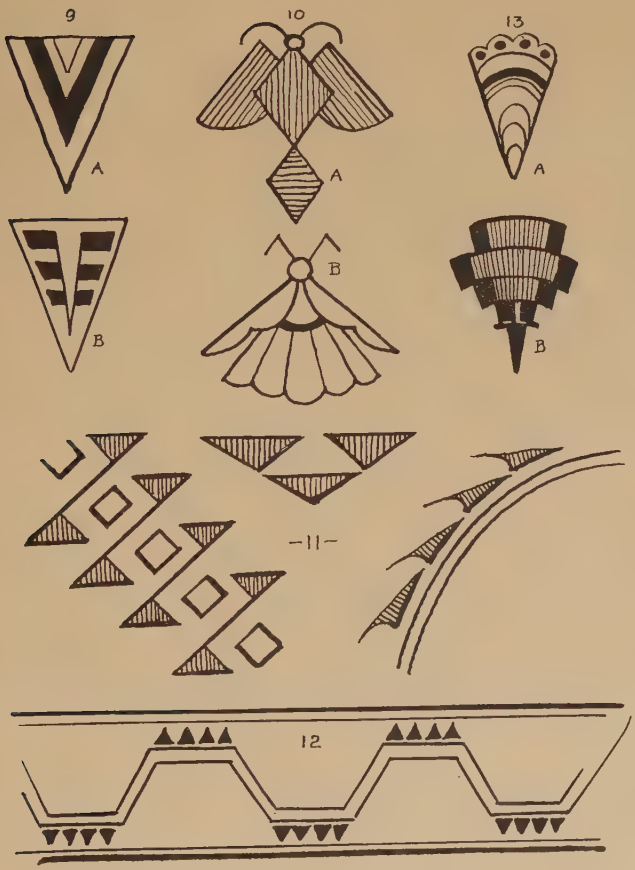


PLATE SIXTEEN

1. Upper row — harpoon, arrows, rattles, spoons, paddles, and tongs.
2. Bows. Used pictorially or as units of design.
3. A, B, C. Arrow heads.
4. A, B, C, D, E. Borders from arrow head units.
5. Tool used in weaving. Often adapted as a unit of design.
6. Cooking bowls, etc. Often used as are the arrow heads in border and surface patterns.

PLATE SIXTEEN

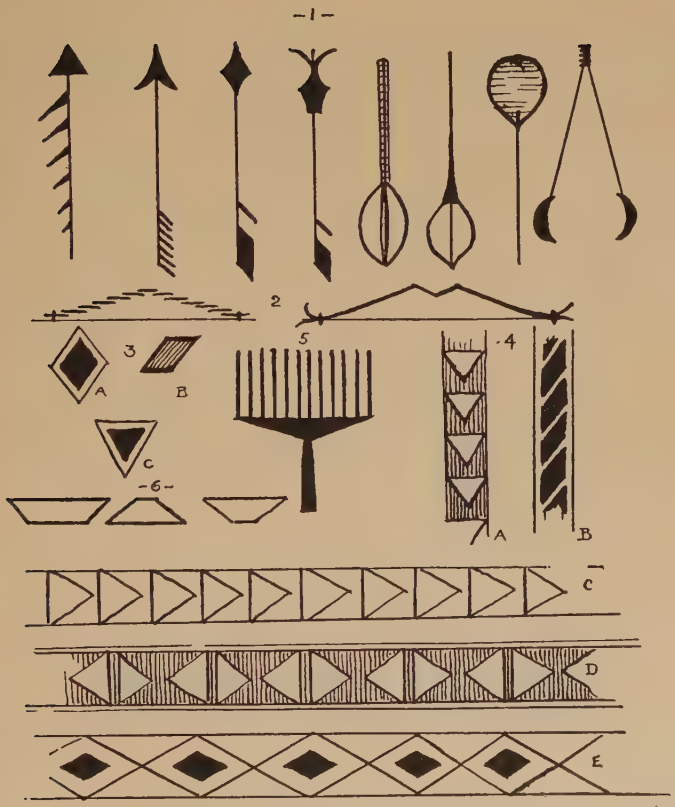


PLATE SEVENTEEN

7. Ladder.
   Steps cut in opposite sides of a log.
8. Spatula, used in patting the damp clay to give a surface texture to an object.
9. Hammer head, used as decorative unit.
10. A, B, C, D. Designs from fish net motive, generally used for surface patterns.
    These were made by pressure upon the soft clay, using either the net or some woven fabric—again they were etched upon the soft clay with a pointed tool, or painted upon the surface when dry.
11. A, B, C. Basket or tray units used in repetition or alternation as units of design. Any common object was used as a motif in their arrangements.

PLATE SEVENTEEN

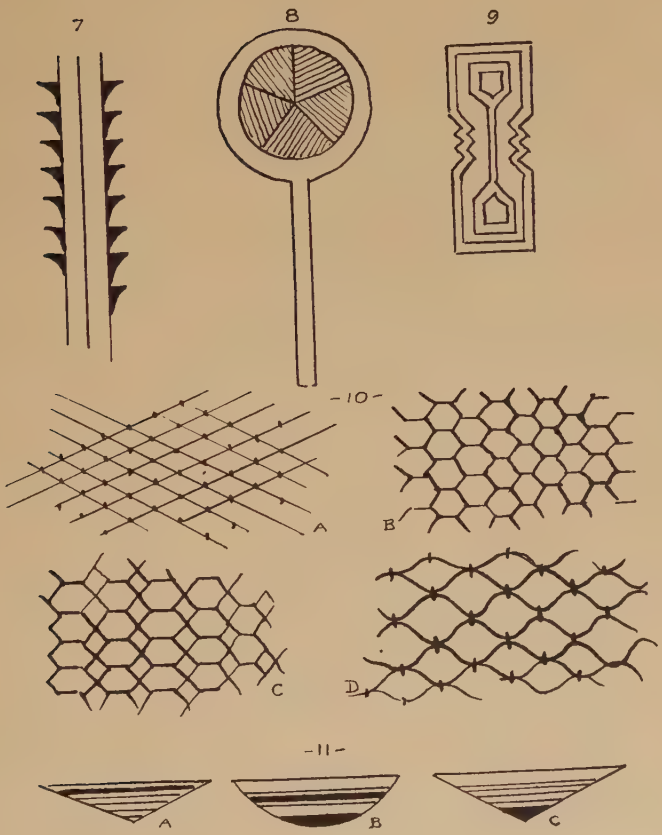


PLATE EIGHTEEN

1. Often the finish of a basket or tray indicated the youth or age of the weaver. If roughly finished (A), it was made by a young woman. If bluntly, but smoothly finished (B), it was woven by a squaw. If smoothly finished (C), in the perfect circle, it was woven by an old woman. The finished circle symbolized the fully rounded or nearly completed life.
2. Periods of time.
3. A, Peace. B, War.
4. A three days' journey. The number of days being indicated by the number of tepees or wigwams.

5, 6. The great unknown.

7. A, B, C, D. These indicate Life. L, in the center stands for the Source of Life. B, for the Beginnings of Life. P, for Plant Life. H, for Human Life, and C, for Celestial Life.
   B, D. A charm. Good fortune, health and prosperity. It counteracts all evil.

PLATE EIGHTEEN

PLATE NINETEEN

8. A. Success. B. Defeat.
9. Degrees of attainment.
10. Flames, prayer.
11. Baskets at burial place, arranged in progression as a design unit.
12. Light and darkness. Good and evil. Life and death.
13. Star of promise.
14. A, B, C, D. The trail and branching trails. E. Direction taken on the trail.
15. Surface pattern with trail motive.

PLATE NINETEEN

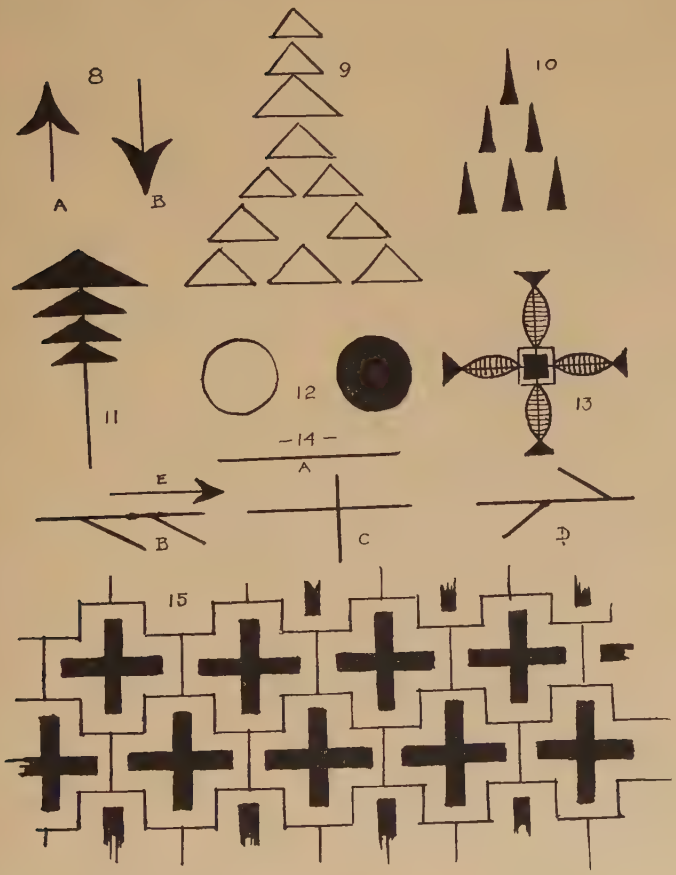


PLATE TWENTY

Interesting types of design.

Nature and conventional units.

The meaning could not be found. Doubtless they were purely decorative forms.

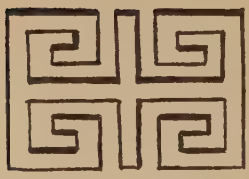


PLATE TWENTY

PLATE TWENTY-ONE

The triangle is another conspicuous unit in Indian design and varies greatly in form. It has also many meanings. Modified geometric units of many types are observed in their decorative details.

1. Here the design doubtless stands for some type of plant form.
2. This was taken from the section of a border about a basket. It probably signifies the mountain side with cliffs and streams.
3. Human face.
4. A, B. Braves, or perhaps white men.

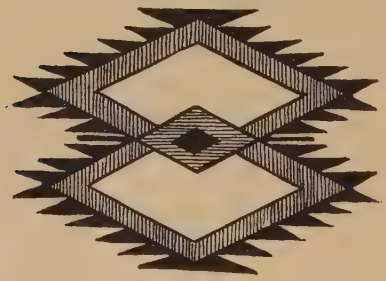


PLATE TWENTY-ONE

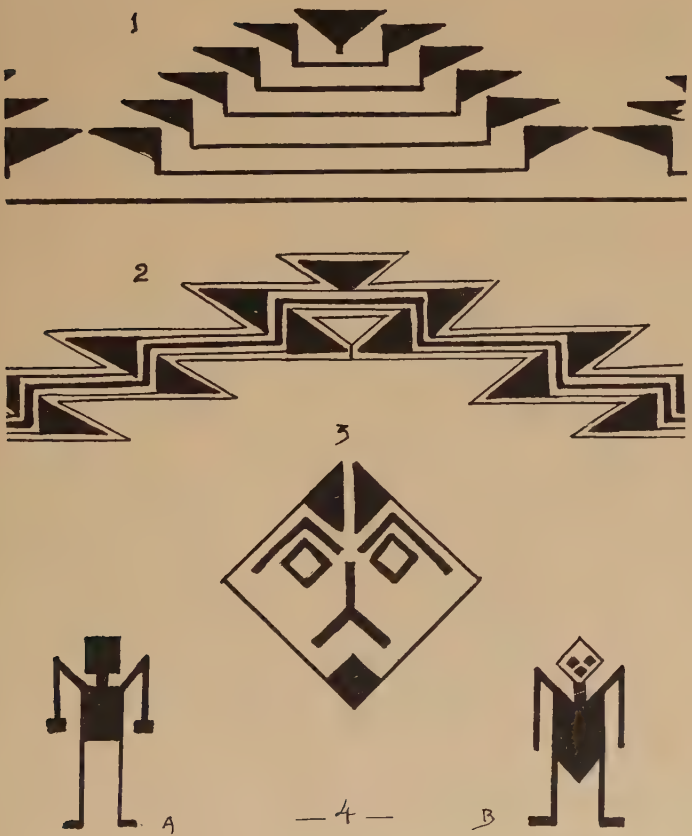


PLATE TWENTY-TWO

This plate exhibits a variety of designs taken from baskets, pottery, and blankets. Having studied the previous pages one finds it easy to detect hills, flowers, tracks, whirlwind, insects, etc.

Just why these were so combined, and their meaning in this case, the writer could not discover. The laws of design as we study them and the decorative treatment are most evident.

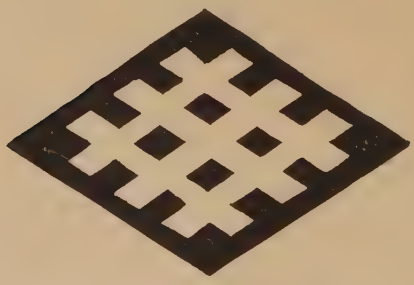
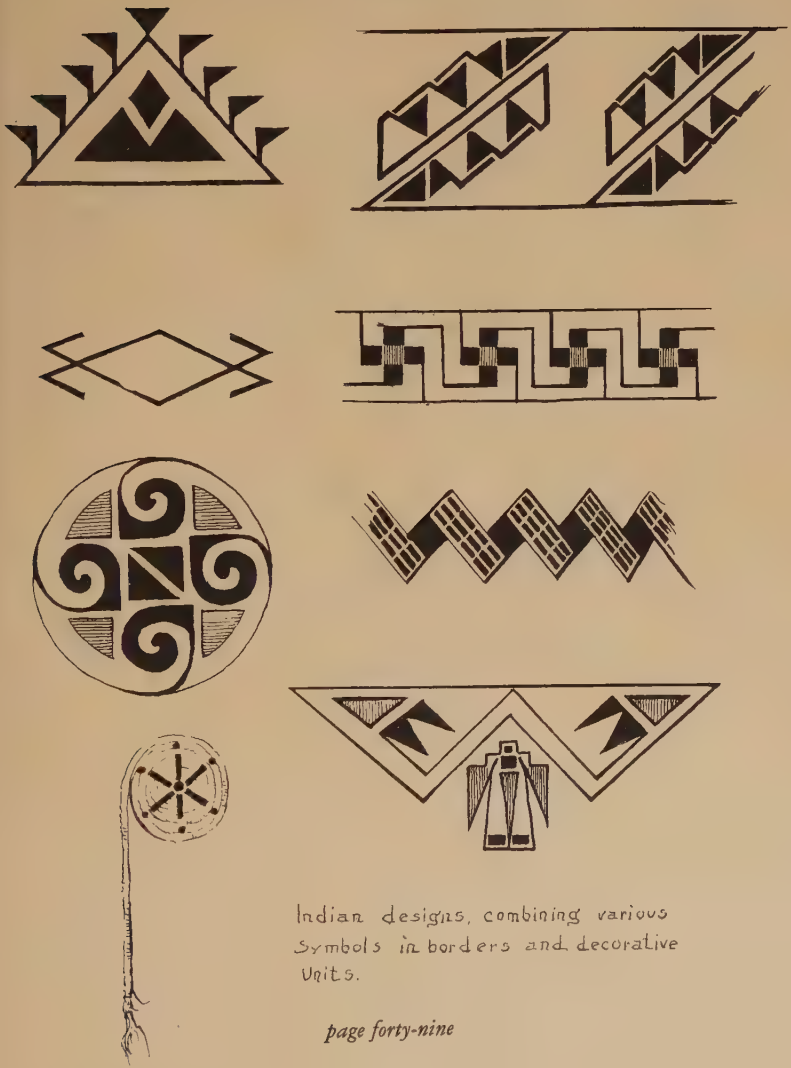


PLATE TWENTY-TWO



Indian designs, combining various symbols in borders and decorative units.

PLATE TWENTY-THREE

Sketches of baskets, vases, etc., showing type of application of design to inner and outer surfaces of objects.

PLATE TWENTY-THREE

PLATE TWENTY-FOUR

1. A prayer basket. Prayer for protection from teeth and claws of wild beasts.
2. Prayer for protection from storms and tempests. The radial design in the center shows the source of all such storms. The outer design shows tempests sweeping across the plateaus, but leaving the valleys in peace.
3. Prayer for protection in the present world, and for the safe return by the open trail to the Spirit world.
4. Design in prayer basket.
   Prayer for rain from any quarter.
   Rain god.
5. Unknown.

Clouds.
Lightning.
Rain.

Probably a prayer for rain.

PLATE TWENTY-FOUR

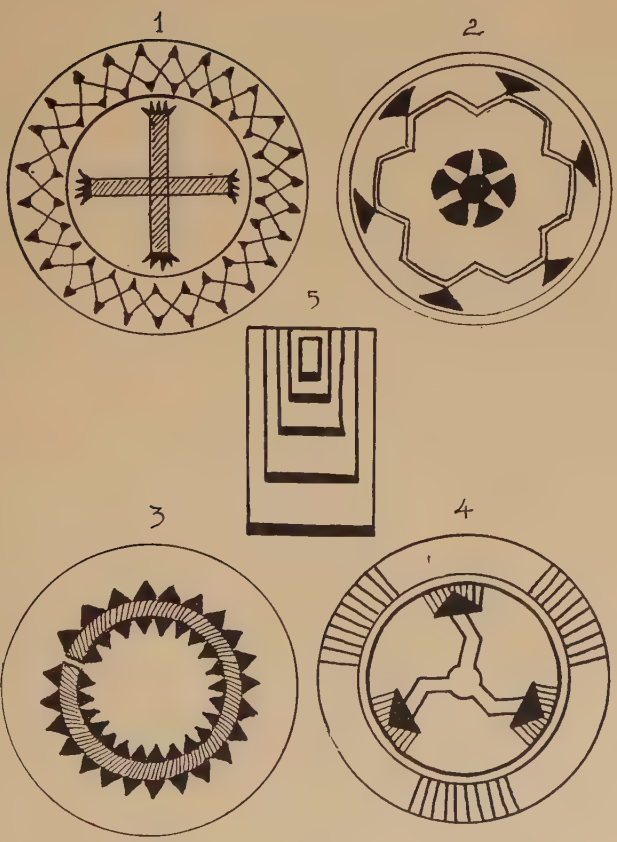
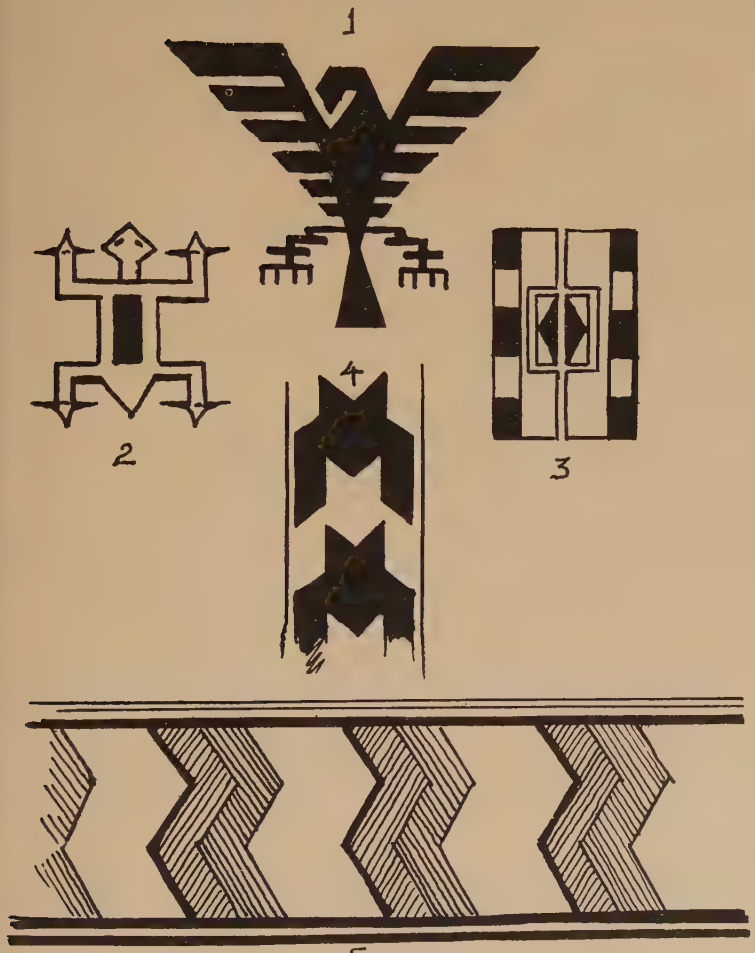


PLATE TWENTY-FIVE

1. Thunder bird.
2. Frog.
   When drawn with long tail, a lizard.
3. Fortress with enemy imprisoned. A possible escape through central trail.
   This was a woven rug design.
4. Vertical border. Unknown.
5. Spirit voices.

PLATE TWENTY-FIVE



A few Indian names. Names are generally taken from some natural object, or as the result of some impressive experience.

Red Bird	Red Cloud
Son of the Star	Big Head
Swift Bird	Iron Cedar
Black Moon	Kill Eagle
Charging Thunder	Lame Deer
Fire Heart	Big Road
Rain in the Face	Curley
Running Antelope	Long Hair
Mad Bear	Circling Bear
Red Fish	Black Bull
Black Feet	Two Moon
Planting near the Water	Eagle Man
Yellow Bear	Red Horse
Appearing Day	Little Fish
Brown Elk	Looking Glass
Running Water	Pretty Lodge
Standing Buffalo	Mad Bear
Eagle Feather	Beautiful White Cow
White Eyebrows	The only one
Hump	Brown Elk

Thunder travelling over the Mountains

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